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ABSTRACT

Since limited funds restrict advertising by Public Broadcasting System (PBS) stations, and since PBS serves a variety of audiences, the selection of appropriate advertising media for PBS programs is difficult. It is further complicated by conflicting research reports on the public use of the daily papers. Availability to the target audience should be the guide in media selection, and institutional ads should promote programs in preference to the station. (WBC)

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Media Selection for Public TV Advertisements

October 26, 1976

by

William F. Hallstead

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MEDIA SELECTION FOR PUBLIC TV ADVERTISEMENTS

NAEB PANEL TALK
October 26, 1976

William F. Hallstead, Director,
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The theme of this little talk is stolen from Leo Durocher or Casey Stengel-- I'm not sure which. But it makes a lot of sense: "If they don't wanna watch, you can't stop 'em."

If the baseball and beer set doesn't want to watch an opera, you can paint your Beverly Sills ad on every bottle of Bud in flourescent yeast, but you won't build that opera audience.

If the mink-and-manure folks don't care for your series on inner city life, you can slap your ad on the cover of every horseshow magazine for a year, but you won't build an audience for that particular program.

Now these are extreme examples. But they illustrate what is often a subtle art. The art of media selection-- where to place your advertising so you'll get the biggest use of your advertising dollars.

I think we have to call media selection an art because there's a lot of native instinct and plain educated guesswork involved. The poor old public TV ad buyer doesn't get a heck of a lot of help from space or time salesmen. The guy is in there talking with you because he knows that his paper or station is exactly what you need. The problem is that he doesn't understand public broadcasting; we hardly understand it ourselves. He doesn't realize that you're trying to unload a whole range of programs on a whole bunch of different audiences. He may understand commercial broadcasters a lot better-- overall, they're trying to grab a big audience of

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women between the ages of 18 and 49, and that's where they aim their program advertising.

Our problem is a lot more complex. For years we've maintained that we want to serve a wide range of diverse small audiences: the young, the old, the Spanish-speaking, the deaf, Blacks, the downtrodden, the uplifted; anyone, in fact, who isn't a commercial TV target.

Now PBS has added a factor to the local station's audience mix. PBS is after 10% of the total audience. Larry Grossman said exactly that in a Broadcasting Magazine interview. So not only are we in the small audience service business. We're also in the ratings race.

Whatever your target audience, your media buying problem would be solved if you had a bunch of ad money. But who has enough to cover everything? PBS tries to help with co-op ad money, but what they're able to give you doesn't go far. Maryland has one of the larger budgets in the system, and so we also have one of the larger PBS ad co-op budgets. But if we were to use that entire amount for a daily ad in the Baltimore Sun through 365 days, the ad would be not quite an inch high. And the Sun is only one of two major papers in Baltimore. We advertise throughout the entire state, and part of the state is covered by the Washington Post and Star. And there are a dozen more daily papers and close to 100 weeklies--all hungry for public TV ad dollars.

--Plus these advertising possibilities: TV Guide, of course; radio stations, magazines, theatre programs, billboards, bus cards, student publications, taxicab tops, commercial TV (if they'll sell us time), matchbooks, buttons, T-shirts, railroad and airport displays, statement stuffers, countercards, milkcartons, restaurant table tents,-- we've even had a pitch from some character who found a way to display ad messages on clouds.

Put all these ad possibilities together, and you have a bottomless pit. If you spend a tiny budget over all of them, or even many of them, it's like dropping a rose petal into the Grand Canyon and waiting to hear the echo.

So what do you do? You get very scientific. You look for every public TV media selection study you can find. Last year, I actually found one. It was a CPB research report on where people get program information. The samplings were made in Chicago, Boston, Sacramento, and San Jose through CPB-sponsored local surveys. Only print media were involved. The studies were made in 1973 and 74, and made available to all stations through the CPB newsletter in August, 1975.

And the findings were full of surprises. We struggle to get publicity in the daily papers, along with our advertising. Yet according to these surveys, less than 10% of the TV viewers interviewed referred to daily newspaper program listings! If that figure is accurate-- or even close-- why in hell are we knocking ourselves out to get a lot of space in daily newspaper?

Where do people get their program information, then? In those four cities, about a third said they referred to the weekly guide that comes with a weekend newspaper.

But the most important reference, according to these studies, was TV Guide: 41% in Sacramento, 43% in Boston, and 47% in both San Jose and Chicago.

Along with these figures, CPB offered what they called "Implications." The most interesting of these told us that-- and I quote-- "The daily newspapers should not be viewed as the primary source for building program awareness."

All right, those CPB studies seem like a good enough guide on which to base some print media decisions. Put maybe half of your money in TV Guide, most of the rest in the weekly TV supplements, and tell the dailies to go bark up a stump.

But wait a minute-- just this month, I got an innocent-looking report from a PBS contractor, and it has a grenade in it. It was put together by Statistical Research, Inc., in New Jersey, and it's called "Summary of A Study of Persons Who Pledged To PTV Stations During Festival '76." If they stick to that title, they'll blow the movie rights, but there are some real jolts in it.

847 people were interviewed by phone for this one; 334 of them were WGBH members; the rest were in 15 markets selected for a cross-section sampling.

Now remember those findings from the CPB report: less than 10% said they used daily program listings. The new report says 37% do.

In the CPB studies, 44% often used TV Guide. In the new report, 32% do.

In the CPB studies, 37% use weekly supplements. In the new report, 35% do.

The TV Guide and Weekly supplement figures are pretty close in both studies, but the new report shows a strong support of dailies, too, 37% compared with less than 10%. In fact, the new report implies that your best medium for program information is the daily paper, while the CPB report says it's the absolute worst.

Confusing and contradictory? Sure, it is. That's why media selection is an art, not a science. And that's why I use a media buying method I call the Great Unabashed Empirical Selection System-- G.U.E.S.S.

The first element for any system of media selection is an ad budget. Some stations have comparatively large advertising budgets, some have moderate amounts, some have none at all. All of them will agree they don't have enough- there never is enough, because advertising is a bottomless ~~pit.~~ landfill.

To get it under some kind of control, you should be aware that there is more than one reason to buy advertising. In fact, I can think of at least six, and I'll list them for you-- not necessarily in order of importance. That is determined by combat circumstances.

O.K., six reasons for placing advertising:

1. To build the audience.
2. To enhance your station's image.
3. To prove to your immediate supervisor that you're doing something.
4. To get a producer temporarily off your back.
5. To massage the media.
6. To build staff morale.

I used to think that reason number one was the only reason: to build an audience. I've learned a lot in 7 years. But let's assume that your primary purpose in advertising is to build an audience for a given program. In fact, let's quickly work out an ad schedule for a program that's something of a challenge: an instructional series on how to cope with inner city life. Let's call it SIDE STREET.

It seems obvious that the big city newspaper should get the whole ad budget. Wait a minute, though. You remember more than one space salesman has told you that the readership of metro dailies by inner city residents is about nil. All right, how about ads in the black newspaper? Not a bad idea, but don't put your whole budget there because its circulation is only 20,000 and you're after 400,000 inner city residents, just half of them black.

So you've found how to reach 5 per cent of the potential audience. What about the other 95 per cent? A little research tells you that there is a lot of TV watching in the inner city-- commercial TV. You decide to commit a big hunk of your budget for commercial TV. Then you find that only one of the three commercial TV stations in town will sell you time.

So you buy a schedule of spots on that channel -- at $300 each, plus production costs, and your budget is 1/3 gone. How about radio? Good thinking. You put another third of the budget into black radio and country music stations. But you should have some print back up.

For an inner city audience that isn't big on newspaper reading, where do you go? An inspiration hits you. Bus cards! More research and you find that you can get two month's posting for one month's fee-- on a lot of busses. And you can choose the routes you want.

So your king size posters go along the sidewalk side of 60 busses. Your radio spots get moving, your TV buy hits through the day of the premiere program, and for $3,000 you have done the best you can.

Now, since this a graphic group presentation, let's concentrate for another minute or two on print advertising only. The CPB and Statistical Research, Inc., studies I talked about earlier tell us that TV Guide is probably the most logical print buy. But you can't put all your dough in TV Guide without running the risk that the local papers will at the least slowly choke off your publicity releases, or at the worst, jump through the phone at your station manager.

There's a little game played by newspapers. It's called "Ad-money-has-nothing-to-do-with-the-publicity-we-give-you." Actually, ad money has a hell of a lot to do with the publicity they give us. In practice, though, you should pretend that the newspapers are pure. Don't try to buy

feature article space with an ad schedule. Just quietly place your ads. In most papers, the publicity will subsequently begin to appear, as if by magic. That old buck magic...

I'd like to finish this off with some quickee suggestions for placing print advertising, depending on the kind of a program you are pushing.

Where would I place my primary print ads for, say, a program on local agriculture? In farming community newspapers, in any local agricultural publication I could find, and in county fair programs. I would not waste my money in metropolitan papers or TV Guide.

How about print ads for a program on deafness and its treatment? I wouldn't place any ads at all. The percentage of deaf people in any audience is so small that most ad money will be wasted. Instead, try press releases to agencies for the deaf.

Ads for a program aimed at teen-agers? Not in newspapers; teen-age readership of newspapers is abysmal. I'd go into radio-- but I'd secretly hope the program would be cancelled. I don't think there is a teen-aged TV audience of any size at all .

Ads for GREAT PERFORMANCES? I'd hit the metro Sunday inserts, the metro dailies, TV Guide, plus radio spots on good music, and classical music stations. Plus TV spots-- whoops, I just ran over the budget!

Ads for SESAME STREET? I wouldn't run any ads to build that audience. Word-of-mouth among parents is already doing the work. But I would run a SESAME STREET ad in the biggest

local newspaper to make a local underwriter feel loved.

And finally, an institutional ad for your station, telling the world that channel 99 offers the best in music, dance, public affairs and children's programs? If you don't name the programs, don't waste your money. Your station manager may think you are unpatriotic for not putting ad money into the name, CHANNEL 99, and its tricky quote mark logo. If the pressure gets too intense, let your art department have a ball and place the ad. But don't look for a single additional viewer. People don't brush their teeth with Procter & Gamble; they brush with Crest. They don't watch dear old Channel 99; they watch UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS.

So put your money where the interest is-- and if they want to watch, you won't be able to stop them.